

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-14

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DRAFTED BY EA/RA:HISOM;EA/LC:MHENDERSON

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CUSTOMS

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 187232

E.O. 11652GDS

TAGS:SNAR, APER, LA

SUBJECT:CUSTOMS STAFFING

REFA.VIENTIANE 6374; B. VIENTIANE 6143

1. AT CUSTOMS' REQUEST, AMBASSADOR VANCE HELD AUGUST 21 MEETING WITH CUSTOMS SERVICE REPS TO DISCUSS RECOMMENDATIONS IN REFTEL B ON REDUCING NUMBER OF CUSTOMS ADVISORS IN LAOS. DESK AND EA/RA ALSO REPRESENTED AT MEETING.

2. AMBASSADOR VANCE BEGAN DISCUSSION BY STATING QUESTION WAS NOT REPEAT NOT WHETHER CUSTOMS SERVICE WOULD HAVE ROLE TO PLAY IN LAOS NARCOTIC CONTROL PROGRAM BUT RATHER HOW MANY PERSONS WERE NEEDED TO CARRY OUT CUSTOMS PART OF THE PROGRAM. CONSENSUS (S/NM, EA/LC, AND EA/RA) IN DEPARTMENT, IS THAT CUSTOMS ADVISOR ROLE IN LAOS CANNOT BE SUBSUMED UNDER DEA WHICH REFTEL B RAISES AS ONE POSSIBILITY.

3. CUSTOMS REPS EXPLAINED THAT WHILE IT WAS NOT CUSTOMS' FUNCTION TO ANALYZE POLITICAL SITUATION IN LAOS, THEY DID FEEL THEIR PROGRAM THERE HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL AND WERE CONCERNED THAT A CUTBACK IN PERSONNEL COULD OPEN THE WAY
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FOR LAOS AGAIN TO BECOME AN IMPORTANT GOLDEN TRIANGLE

TRAFFICKING ROUTE. FORMER LAO CAD CHIEF LECLAIR GAVE DEFENSE FOR RETAINING FOUR CUSTOMS POSITIONS IN LAOS ARGUING POLITICAL SITUATION DOES NOT AFFECT CUSTOMS ROLE BECAUSE ITS REVENUE BUILDING ASPECT RECOGNIZED BY BOTH SIDES IN COALITION AS BENEFICIAL.

4. AMBASSADOR VANCE EXPLAINED THAT THE DEPARTMENT'S POSITION IS THAT WE WILL DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO FURTHER NARCOTIC CONTROL PROGRAM OBJECTIVES IN LAOS, BUT OUR ACTIONS ARE LIMITED BY CHANGING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN THAT COUNTRY. SINCE FORMATION OF COALITION GOVT., US NO LONGER ABLE PLAY THE SAME ROLE IN LAOS AS BEFORE. IT NOW HAS TO DEAL WITH THE PATHET LAO IN NEW GOVERNMENT WHO DO NOT DISTINGUISH AMONG AMERICANS WHETHER CUSTOMS OR AID OR EMBASSY OR OTHER; ALL AMERICANS FROM THEIR VIEW-POINT ARE BASICALLY UNWANTED. FROM THE POLITICAL STANDPOINT IT THEREFORE WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS IN ALL AGENCIES WHO COULD NO LONGER PLAY A VITAL OR EFFECTIVE ROLE UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. IN LOOKING AT THE CURRENT CUSTOMS FIELD POSITIONS, CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES COULD BE SEEN: 1) IN PAKSE, NARCOTICS WAS NOT A MAJOR ELEMENT OF SMUGGLING; 2) IN BAN HOUET SAI, CUSTOMS HAS HAD DIFFICULTY KEEPING A MAN ON STATION; AND 3) WATTAY AIRPORT WOULD SOON COME UNDER JOINT CONTROL WHICH WILL MAKE US CUSTOMS PRESENCE THERE UNTENABLE.

5. IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE MOST EFFECTIVE CUSTOMS ROLE IN LAOS, AMBASSADOR VANCE SUGGESTED THE FOLLOWING PROPOSAL BE SUBMITTED TO THE EMBASSY FOR CONSIDERATION:
A) THREE FIELD ADVISOR POSITIONS BE ELIMINATED DURING FY75 BUT ONE ADVISOR BE ASSIGNED TO ASSIST TEAM CHIEF IN VIENTIANE CONCENTRATE ON INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAO CUSTOMS SERVICE. (HIS ACCEPTABILITY BY GOVT. AND HIS EFFECTIVENESS WOULD BE MEASURED BY AMBASSADOR DURING FY75 WHO WOULD DETERMINE WHETHER THIS POSITION SHOULD ALSO BE ELIMINATED BY END FY75 OR CONTINUED UNTIL NO LATER THAN END FY76 WHEN CAD SHOULD BE PHASED OUT.)

B) US CUSTOMS ANTI-NARCOTICS IN-COUNTRY TRAINING BE
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OFFERED TO LAO GOVERNMENT AT AN EARLY DATE. (NOTE: DEPARTMENT DOES NOT AGREE WITH MISSION THAT CAD'S PURPOSE IN LAOS IS NOT INSTITUTION BUILDING AS MENTIONED PARA 4 REFTEL A. ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF CUSTOMS TEAM IN LAOS WAS TO PROVIDE DEMONSTRATION TRAINING ASSISTANCE FOR SHORT TERM. FURTHERMORE, INSTITUTION BUILDING IS A MAJOR GOAL OF OUR OVERALL NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM OVERSEAS.)

6. CUSTOMS REPS AGREED AMBASSADOR VANCE'S PROPOSED SOLUTION SHOULD BE SENT TO EMBASSY WHICH MUST HAVE FINAL SAY ON COMPOSITION STAFFING OF MISSION.

7. FYI: CUSTOMS COMMISSIONER ACREE IN AUGUST 20 LETTER

TO AMBASSADOR VANCE (COPY BEING POUCHED) PROPOSED PHASE-OUT OF CAD BY END OF FY76. TEXT OF SPECIFIC CUSTOMS PROPOSALS FOLLOWS:

BEGIN QUOTE: 1) THAT THE POSITION ABOLISHED IN VIENTIANE 6143 BE RETAINED, TO BE FILLED BY A QUALIFIED CUSTOMS OFFICER WHO WILL CONCENTRATE ON THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAO CUSTOMS. THIS POSITION WILL BE ESTABLISHED FOR A TWO-YEAR PERIOD WITH A TARGET PHASE OUT IN THE LATTER PART OF 1976.

2) WITH RESPECT TO THE THREE REMAINING POSITIONS, WHILE SPECIFIC PERSONNEL ROTATION MAY RESULT IN A SOMEWHAT EARLIER DEPARTURE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ONE POSITION BE PHASED OUT AT THE END OF FISCAL YEAR 1975 AND THE OTHER TWO AT THE END OF FISCAL YEAR 1976.

3) THAT US CUSTOMS CCINC ANTINARCOTIC TRAINING BE SCHEDULED AT THE SOONEST POSSIBLE DATE. END QUOTE.

7. DEPARTMENT REQUESTS EARLY RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR VANCE'S PROPOSAL PARA 5 ABOVE. KISSINGER

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